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A Best Picture nominees refresher

Getting ready for an Oscars party? On Sunday, the 91st Academy Awards ceremony will air on ABC. Red carpet coverage will begin at 4 p.m. here and the ceremony will begin at 7 p.m.

Use this tip sheet summarizing the eight Best Picture nominees to wow the other fete guests with your predictions:

“Black Panther”

“Black Panther” is the biggest-budget action movie (\$200 million) ever to feature a black superhero, grossing more than \$1.3 billion. Its setting is Wakanda, a high-tech African Arcadia, untouched and uncontaminated by an enslaved or colonized mindset. The movie taps into moral, economic and political debates that are taking place all over the world: populism vs. globalism, exceptionalism vs. inclusion, technology vs. tradition, decency vs. leadership.

The film’s primary appeal resides with the complexity of its villain, Erik Killmonger, who spends his life training, preparing and killing just to be ready for the day he will challenge his cousin T’Challa (Chadwick Boseman) for the Wakandan throne and the title of Black Panther.

Killmonger is everything we hate — violent, disrespectful, cruel — yet he is, at some level, justified. His ferocious worldview reflects the brutality and loss he has suffered in his life. Because the system won’t let him win — even when he follows the rules — he takes matters into his own hands.

Odds makers rank “Black Panther” at No. 4 of eight in the Best Picture category.

“BlacKkKlansman”

On a slow day in 1979, Ron Stallworth (John David Washington), the first African-American police detective in the Colorado Springs (Colo.) Police Department, perused classified listings in the local newspaper. He noticed an ad seeking recruits for the region’s Ku Klux Klan chapter and signed up.

Stallworth was surprised that the white alter ego he created on the telephone was so enthusiastically received by the Colorado Klan leadership and by David Duke (Topher Grace), then the 20-something Grand Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

Spike Lee, who received a Best Director nomination for this film, draws a straight line linking past to present through David Duke. He bookends Grace’s portrayal of the young Klan leader with footage of the 70ish, country club-presentable Duke of Charlottesville, who declared that the rally “fulfill[ed] the promises of Donald Trump.”

Adam Driver, nominated in the Best Supporting Actor category, plays Flip Zimmerman, Stallworth’s Jewish colleague, who is forced to consider what it means to deny his heritage.

Odds makers rank “BlacKkKlansman” at No. 5 of eight in the Best Picture category.

“Bohemian Rhapsody”

It doesn’t really matter that this musical depiction of the life of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury (Rami Malek) isn’t a great movie. It’s a great time. Malek’s Mercury is a silhouette of the man of swagger, multioctave range and dominant stage presence that we remember — part Jagger, part Brian Wilson and part Liberace.

The music’s dynamite-with-a-laser-beam earworms set off waves of pleasantly wistful, exuberant nostalgia, even among those who aren’t committed Queen fans. “Bohemian Rhapsody” hits all the notes of a proper jukebox musical.

Odds makers rank “Bohemian Rhapsody” at No. 6 of eight in the Best Picture category.

“The Favourite”

“The Favourite” is an 18th century “All About Eve” with an O. Henry ending. It imagines a carnal, psychological and political competition between Lady Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough (Rachel Weisz) and her disgraced cousin, Abigail Masham (Emma Stone), for the



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favor and control of the erratic and unhappy queen Anne (Olivia Colman), who reigned from 1702 to 1714.

With comic audacity, director Yorgos Lanthimos integrates absurdist surprises into what is otherwise a full-on costume drama. The film’s male characters, with their painted-doll faces, flamboyant Cowardly Lion wigs and games of nude fruit dodgeball, are ridiculous fops.

The women, by contrast, never have a moment of pleasure or frivolity. Sex, drinking and dancing are all occasions of court intrigue. Every move in the chess game between Sarah and Abigail leaves a winner and a loser in its wake. The two continue thus until, in the final checkmate, everyone loses.

Odds makers rank “The Favourite” at No. 3 of eight in the Best Picture category.

“Green Book”

The film’s title refers to “The Negro Motorist Green Book,” a travel guide for African-Americans, published from 1936 to 1967. The green guide sold in gas stations, listed safe places for black motorists to dine, lodge and fuel-up while traveling across the U.S.

“Green Book” takes the perspective of Tony “Lip” Vallelonga (Viggo Mortensen), a white Bronx tough-guy who was hired

by the black concert pianist and musical prodigy Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali) to serve as his driver and bodyguard during a 1962 concert tour below the Mason-Dixon line. The film inevitably develops into a buddy movie of warmth and humor as Tony and Shirley, a closeted gay man drawn out of his shell by the garrulous Tony, drive deeper and deeper into the segregated South.

Odds makers rank “Green Book” at No. 2 of eight in the Best Picture category.

“Roma”

Alfonso Cuarón’s last Oscar movie, “Gravity” (2015), was as big as the stratosphere. “Roma” is a small jewel box of a movie, filmed in black and white, about his childhood in the Mexico City neighborhood of Colonia Roma. The movie focuses on the indigenous Mexican nanny in the household of a European-Mexican family. She holds the children together, notwithstanding her own travails, as the parents divorce. First-time actor Yalitza Aparicio, who plays the nanny, is nominated as Best Actress for the role.

“Roma” is the frontrunner of the nominees. Odds makers rank “Roma” at No. 1 of eight in the Best Picture category.

“A Star Is Born”

“A Star is Born” is an ever-green Pygmalion story in which a famous man discovers a talented young woman, then self-destructs when her star eclipses his. What makes the 2018 version of this movie special — and the music so fantastic — is that Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper play the couple. The chemistry between Cooper and Gaga is magnetic, as is the actors’ chemistry with the audience. As far as this film is concerned, the lovers are the only people in the world — and everything we want to see.

Odds makers rank “A Star is Born” at No. 7 of eight in the Best Picture category.

“Vice”

Dick Cheney has a bad heart. That is the reigning metaphor of

“Vice,” the cheeky telling of former Vice President Dick Cheney’s (Christian Bale) political ascension, bewildering near-total grasp of presidential power and stealthy, Teflon resilience.

At the feet of Don Rumsfeld (Steve Carell), Cheney learned

how real power operates in Washington. He learned to pounce into the vacuum that surrounds weak and weakened presidents. So, it’s no surprise when Cheney offers to relieve George W. Bush (Sam Rockwell) of the “mundane” aspects of the presi-

dency — a laundry list of executive powers — Bush delightedly agrees.

Director Adam McKay’s excitable style of quasi-reporting makes Cheney look like a winner — the kind of guy who can talk his way into anything, by saying

nothing. In his jaw-dropping transformation into character, Bale assumes not only Cheney’s voice but his stillness, patience and logistical cruelty.

Odds makers rank “Vice” as No. 8 of eight in the Best Picture category.